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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#)  
SUBJECT: LOW VOTER TURNOUT LEADS TO BIG ZANU-PF WIN

REF: A. HARARE 1283

[1](#)B. HARARE 1235

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (SBU) Preliminary results reported in the government-controlled press today are calling Saturday's rural district council elections a ZANU-PF victory. Official results are expected by Tuesday, October 31. The key feature of the elections was very low voter turnout. Initial reports from election observers (including embassy officers) also noted some isolated incidents of intimidation and violence, including government distribution of food to influence voters. End Summary.

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ZANU-PF's Expected Win  
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[1](#)2. (U) Saturday, October 28 was election day for 1,326 rural district council seats throughout the country. As expected, ZANU-PF appears to have maintained its traditional dominance in rural areas (Ref A). Official results will not be released by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) until Tuesday, October 31. However, the country's two daily newspapers, The Herald and The Daily Mirror, both controlled by the government, claimed sweeping victories for ZANU-PF. ZANU-PF had won 454 seats before the elections were even held, thanks to the de-registration of hundreds of opposition candidates (Ref B).

[1](#)3. (U) In the day's most closely watched election, the race for mayor in Kadoma, a medium-sized city in Mashonaland West,

the incumbent ZANU-PF mayor Fani Phiri appears to have won reelection against the anti-Senate MDC candidate Jonas Ndenda. Unofficial results published in The Herald showed that Phiri received 4,614 votes while Ndenda received 2,491 votes.

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Marred By Low Voter Turnout and GOZ Misconduct  
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¶4. (SBU) The Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (ZESN), which fielded 520 observers nationwide, and the embassy officers acting as observers identified low turnout as the key characteristic of the elections. The preliminary results from Kadoma, for instance, showed that slightly more than 7,000 people voted in an area with 42,000 registered voters. In the 2002 mayoral election in Kadoma, 13,000 people voted, with ZANU-PF garnering 6,886 votes and the MDC 6,214 votes. Moreover, election observers reported short lines and low turnout at most polling stations throughout the country.

¶5. (C) The elections, though relatively peaceful, were also marred by government misconduct. According to ZESN about 1000 voters were excluded in Kadoma for improper registration, a sizable percentage of the total turnout there. There were also media reports that the government distributed food aid in the weeks prior to the election to influence voters. MDC officials told emboffs that a number of traditional leaders, co-opted by ZANU-PF, had pressured their constituents to support the ruling party. Finally, unknown assailants vandalized the home of the anti-Senate MDC candidate for Kadoma mayor by throwing rocks through the front windows on the eve of the election.

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Comment  
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¶6. (C) A culture of intimidation, election fatigue developed in past elections, and an overwhelming sense of futility appears to have led to voter apathy and low turnout. Many voters were afraid of repercussions for voting against the government or, if not afraid, felt their votes would have no effect. These elections drive home the point that what is important is not merely the act of voting but the entire process of candidate registration, voter registration, voter education, and campaigning. They also underscore ZANU-PF's effectiveness at fighting back against a once surging MDC by mixing violence and a sense of hopelessness in the face of a ZANU juggernaut to discourage an already hard-pressed electorate.

¶7. (U) We plan to attend the ZESN post-election briefing scheduled for Tuesday, October 31, and will report in septel on the official results of the election as well as ZESN's analysis of the low turnout.

DELL